

A Message to Small Churches

Faithful Servants

Roots of Evolutionary Theory

GEORGE WHITEFIELD – Book Review

VOLUME 39 NUMBER 5

OCTOBER 1970

The Changing Scene and the Unchanging World

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever."—Isaiah 40:8.

We certainly have before us today a changing scene, and very ominous are the figures that stalk across it. . . . Everywhere we find centralization of power under an arbitrary bureaucracy; the area of liberty is slowly but very surely being reduced The solid foundations of liberty and honesty are crumbling beneath our feet.

Yes, it is certainly true that we have before us today a changing scene.

In the midst of that changing scene, is there anything that is constant? Is there anything solid at all in the midst of the shifting sands? Can we find a safe refuge anywhere from the destructive forces that are so mightily at work? Is there anything at all that we can trust? . . .

The answer to that question is given by the text that stands at the top of this page. . . . There are many things that change. But there is one thing that does not change. That one thing is the Word of God. . . .

Where shall we today find the Word of God? Our answer is very simple. We find it in the whole Bible [for] the Bible is the Word of God.

There, at last, we find something that we can trust. We cannot trust the world; we cannot trust that elusive something known as "civilization." We cannot, alas, trust the visible Church. But when God speaks we can trust Him. He has spoken in the Bible.

(Written for **The Presbyterian Guardian**, by the Rev. J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Litt.D., as an introduction to the first issue, October 7, 1935.)

BOOK REVIEW

GEORGE WHITEFIELD: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival, volume 1, by Arnold A. Dallimore. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970. (Hard cover, 610 pp., \$7.50)

Would you like to read the best biography of the greatest Reformed evangelist, George Whitefield? Then read this book by Mr. Arnold A. Dallimore. You may forget to talk to your wife (or husband, as the case may be); you may forget to go to work; but it's worth a few sacrifices.

Why do I go to such extremes? To talk like that is surely abnormal. Yes, it is. But I did get into an unusually abnormal frame of mind when I read the book. Besides, I am even now, weeks later, still abnormal. My urge is to tell you about the sensational element in the book and then, for lack of space, not to tell you about more permanently significant matters.

Wesley and the devil

But is it really only a matter of sensationalism when you read John Wesley's address to the devil in his sermon on *Free Grace*? The text was Romans 8:32. But there was, says Dallimore, "no attempt to expound or to present its contextual setting" (p. 309). "The nature of the sermon is best indicated in his own description of it as 'against predestination'" (p. 309). "Call it therefore by whatever name you please, 'election, preterition, predestination, or reprobation,' it comes in the end to the same thing. The sense of all is plainly this — by virtue of an external, unchangeable, irresistable decree of God, one part of mankind are infallibly saved, and the rest infallibly damned; . . ." (p. 310).

The doctrine of predestination, said Wesley, "is a doctrine full of blasphemy." "This doctrine represents our blessed Lord, 'Jesus Christ the righteous', 'the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth', as an hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common sincerity" (p. 311).

"Having made these assertions," says Dallimore, "Wesley adopted for the sake of argument a position in which he supposed the doctrine of predestination to be true, and from that position he thus addressed the devil: 'Thou fool, why dost thou roar about any longer? Thy lying in wait for souls is as needless and useless as our preaching. Hearest thou not that God hath taken thy work out of thy hands; and that He doeth it more effectually? Thou, with all thy principalities and powers, canst only so assault that we resist thee; but He can irresistibly destroy both body and soul in hell! Thou canst only entice; but his unchangeable decree to leave thousands of souls in death compels them to continue in sin till they drop into everlasting burnings'" (p. 312).

But I must stop. There is much more like it. What a pity that such a great preacher as John Wesley should so signally misrepresent the gospel of free grace as Whitefield had preached it before him. Whitefield knew that the biblical teaching of the sovereign grace of God is not determinism. Whitefield continued to preach the sovereign grace of God, and by the power of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit men responded in faith.

Preaching on shipboard

I wish I could tell you about Whitefield's preaching on board the *Whitaker* on the way to America (p. 151). Everybody on deck looked at him "as an imposter, and for a while treated him as such" (p. 152). But soon he was "having 'a dish of coffee' with the military chaplain" (p. 153). Ere long many of "a scornful, cursing, company" "stood forth to say their catechism" while "almost all attended Divine service morning and evening seven days a week" (p. 155).

But the *Whitaker* alone was not enough. The *Amy* and the *Lightfoot* were travelling with the *Whitaker*. On occasion Whitefield's voice reached to all three vessels at once. "What a sight this must have been! The calm sea, the three vessels clustered together, the crowded decks ablaze with the red coats of the soldiers, and one deck serving as a open-air chapel, replete with make-shift benches, and, possibly, a male choir. Before them stands the young chaplain, a Captain on each side and officers round about. In a voice which can be clearly heard on each of the three vessels, he leads a service which includes the singing of Psalms and the prayers of the Church of England liturgy. Many who recently cursed God now join in the words of petition and praise" (p. 158).

I need not tell you about wily old Ben Franklin standing near Front Street in Philadelphia, estimating how many people could hear and understand Whitefield as he preached. But you may have heard how canny old Ben heard one of Whitefield's sermons pleading for help for his orphans and said, "I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars and five pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver; and he finished so admirably that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all" (pp. 481f.).

A proposal of marriage

In his earlier days Whitefield seemed to think that marriage would not mix with his work as an evangelist. Elizabeth Delamotte in England was of a different opinion. Finally White-

field himself worked out a unique way of mixing them.

He would marry Elizabeth. "His plan, however, was not to make a proposal on the basis of affection—such a step would be tantamount to an admission of defeat. Rather, Bethesda was sorely in need of a woman to superintend its affairs, and he decided to offer her the position, and at the same time suggest marriage as a secondary element of the whole proposition" (p. 469).

"Can you bear the inclemencies of the air," he wrote to Elizabeth, "both as to cold and heat in a foreign climate? Can you, when you have a husband, be as though you had none, and willingly part with him even for a long season, when his Lord and Master shall call him forth to preach the Gospel, and command him to leave you behind?" (p. 471).

Says Dallimore: "Such was Whitefield's offer of marriage. We may be tempted to smile at his incredible

naivete, but his intense sincerity is manifest in every line. We must admire the noble ideal that would allow nothing to diminish his devotion to Christ, yet at the same time can but regret the distorted view of marriage which drove him, though he possessed such extraordinary capacities for tenderness and affection, to a proposal so cold and formal as this" (pp. 472f.).

Well, here I am at the end of my review. I have done what I did not want to do. I have given you nothing but a taste of the most exciting events in Whitefield's life and labor, and have not given you the solid meat with respect to his utterly self-denying and therefore powerful preaching ministry. Mr. Dallimore does not fail to point out Whitefield's faults and failures; it was in spite of these, by the sovereign grace of God which he proclaimed, that he was able to do so marvelous a piece of work for his Savior.

Cornelius Van Til

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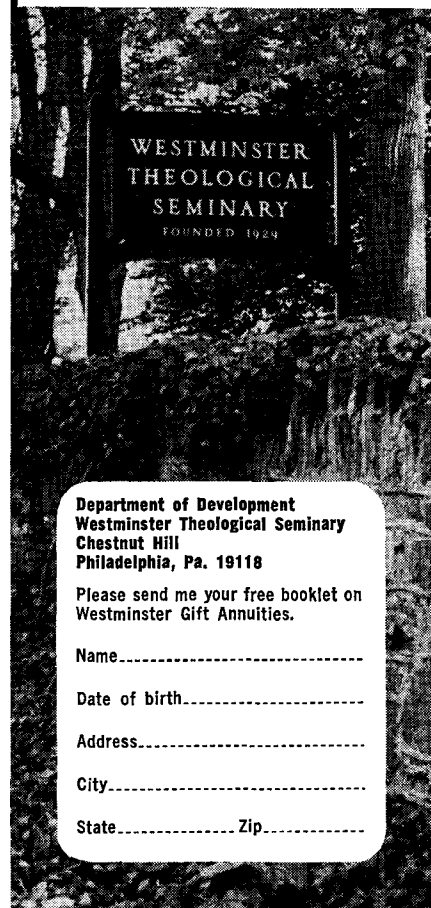
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